

## **The Past and Pending by [curiositydoor](#)**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, Family, Flashbacks, Friendship

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Barbara "Barb" Holland, Carol (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Tommy H. (Stranger Things), Will Byers

**Relationships:** Jonathan Byers/Original Female Character(s), Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2016-11-11

**Updated:** 2016-11-11

**Packaged:** 2022-04-02 00:14:26

**Rating:** General Audiences

**Warnings:** No Archive Warnings Apply

**Chapters:** 2

**Words:** 2,335

**Publisher:** [archiveofourown.org](https://archiveofourown.org)

**Summary:**

A flashback to the weekend before the disappearances of Barb and Will, from Nancy and Jonathan's respective points of view. May eventually use this as a springboard to explore what happened after Will's return.

## 1. Last Weekend

She has to beg Barb to drive her to the mall.

After agonizing all week about the fact that he had barely looked in her direction since they made out, her heart began to race when she found Steve Harrington leaning against her locker at the end of the day. But she tried her best to act naturally as he asked what she was doing on Saturday night and invited her to the Hawk. And then she rushed home to raid her closet, only to realize that everything she owned would be more appropriate for Sunday school than a date with one of the coolest guys in town.

“Come on,” she wheedles, dragging out the syllable in the last word. “We’re going out tomorrow, and I don’t have a single thing to wear.”

Even though they’re talking on the phone, Nancy can imagine Barbara rolling her eyes behind her oversized frames. She can’t blame her. They’ve been best friends for years, and they’ve shared everything with each other – their hopes and fears, the minutiae of their everyday encounters, the crushes they’ve had on the boys in their classes, and all the stories of awkward hugs and first kisses and the angst of middle school breakups. More often than not, it was on Nancy’s end, but Barbara always listened patiently, offered practical advice, and most of all, remained a constant presence in her life.

This is an entirely different situation. Nancy and Barb used to stick to their own grade and within their social stratosphere. They certainly weren’t popular, but they were friendly with their peers, and they weren’t in marching band or the Mathletes or other groups that seemed like social suicide in high school. In fact, they didn’t really belong to any clique, but it hadn’t ever mattered because they had each other.

Eventually, Barb sighs, resigned. “What time is he picking you up?”

“Five o’clock,” she chirps. “Come on, Barb, be excited for me! This is our first date. Nicole’s party didn’t count.”

“I *know.*” It’s the only thing Nancy has been able to talk about since

last Saturday, picking apart every word they exchanged in excruciating detail, before they stepped out onto the patio and stopped saying anything at all. “I’ll pick you up at noon. Or is that not enough time?”

Her voice is dripping with sarcasm, but Nancy is too preoccupied to care. “That’s perfect. You’re the best!”

“You’re only friends with me so I can drive you around, aren’t you?”

She isn’t actually angry, so Nancy teases back, “Of course not. You also help me with chemistry.”

“We should make flashcards for the test after we go shopping. That is, assuming you don’t take five hours to pick out an outfit.”

She pauses. “Maybe I’ll just get a new top then.”

They both laugh, and in the distance, Nancy can hear her mom calling her for dinner.

“Ugh, I have to go. See you tomorrow?”

“See you,” Barb echoes, and they hang up.

She walks to the other end of the cul-de-sac and waits for him. They set this meeting place to spare them the trouble of her parents finding out if he honked his horn outside their house, or God forbid, actually rang the doorbell.

The blouse she’s wearing – an old one, she and Barb hadn’t been able to find anything good – is too thin for the early November chill, and she hugs her shoulders, wishing she had thought to bring a jacket. Maybe Steve will be a gentleman and lend her his.

But chivalry is not exactly the reason that girls at Hawkins High swoon over Steve Harrington. Nancy and Barb used to make fun of them for throwing themselves at him, even as she secretly admired his hair, his smile, his easy confidence. She never imagined that he would spare her a passing glance, but Nicole invited her to her

Halloween party as thanks for helping with her essay on *Ethan Frome*, and the rest was history.

As he pulls up in his BMW, she casts a look around her street before climbing in the front seat, offering a cursory hello to Tommy H. and Carol in the back. Steve leans over and kisses her.

“Hey,” he says, his face only inches from hers.

“Hey,” she repeats breathlessly.

“God, can’t you wait until we’re in the theater?” Carol whines. “That way it’ll be too dark for us to see you.”

“And for you to see what we’re doing.” Tommy waggles his eyebrows, and Nancy is thoroughly disgusted, but Steve shakes his head and drives off.

At the theater, he pays for all their tickets, and Nancy accepts it with a grateful, “Thank you.” Tommy and Carol just snatch theirs from his hand, and they’re about to walk inside when Tommy calls out to the employee at the ticket booth. “Is this movie any good?”

After he receives no response, he marches over, and Nancy groans inwardly. “What’s that? I didn’t hear you.”

“Some people like it.” The voice sounds muted, disinterested.

“*Some people?*” he scoffs. “But not you?”

“I’m not really into James Bond.”

He looks around the group incredulously and then back at the counter. “Oh yeah? So what kinds of movies are you into?”

More silence follows, but Tommy is glaring at him now.

“Hey, freak. I asked you a question.”

“*The Dead Zone* is okay,” he mumbles.

“I’ve never heard of it.”

Nancy wishes that Tommy would just leave the guy alone, so she hugs her arms around her shoulders. “Can we go inside now?” she asks Steve. “I’m cold.”

He nods and turns to his friend. “Jesus, give him a break. Let’s just watch the movie.”

Tommy walks away, but not before aiming a final grimace in his direction. “What’s that guy’s problem? *I don’t like James Bond*,” he says in a high-pitched, mocking tone that sounds nothing like him.

“It’s like he thinks he’s better than us,” Carol snorts. “What’s that word? He’s so *protentious*.”

*Protentious*, Nancy thinks, but she wisely keeps it to herself.

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After the movie (which Nancy privately agrees isn’t her taste), they grab some food at the diner, and then Steve drops Tommy and Carol off before finding a quiet place near the woods to park.

To her surprise, Steve *is* a gentleman. When it’s clear that she isn’t ready, he tells her that it’s fine, there’s no rush. Yet she wonders if he’s disappointed, and when he promises to call her as they part ways, she can’t decide if he actually will.

Nonetheless, she makes a mental note to ask Barb to drive her back to the mall tomorrow. A new top is still in order, and even that isn’t going to be enough if it’s the first thing to be tossed aside.

By the time she gets home, her parents are already upstairs, and Mike and his friends are sitting on the floor in the living room, gathered around the TV.

“Hey, Nancy!” Dustin calls out. “We’re watching Indiana Jones. Wanna join?”

“You mean, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?” Lucas corrects him, receiving an elbow to the chest in return. “Ow!”

Nancy rolls her eyes. “I’m going to bed. Don’t stay up too late,” she

tells her younger brother, but he and Will are engrossed in the movie while the other boys continue to scuffle.

She climbs the stairs, and now that she's alone, she can't stop her face from spreading into a smile. She wonders if Barb is still awake. There's so much that she needs to tell her.

## 2. The Vast Majority

### Summary for the Chapter:

A look inside Jonathan's mind and what his life was like before Will went missing.

He promises to take Will to the arcade on Monday afternoon.

Things have been so busy with school and work, and he's sorry that they haven't spent much time together, he really is. But money has been tight, and with the holidays coming up, he and his mom have been picking up every shift they can to save up for an Atari.

Last year, Jonathan gave him a Walkie-Talkie. He taught him how to dial into the right frequency, and Will practically shouted, "Dustin, this is Will! Dustin, do you copy?" (Lucas and Mike's houses were out of range.) They could just hear Dustin's staticky "*I can hear you loud and clear, Will. Over!*" and Will beamed.

Jonathan felt a surge of pride as he left his brother's room. It had almost been enough to distract him from the fact that he didn't have anyone he could call, not even to wish them a Merry Christmas.

An Atari is something they can enjoy together, at least.

"Really?" Will asks, his mouth full of toast.

"Finish your food," he laughs, tousling his brother's mousy hair. "Yeah, I have Monday off. You'll be at Mike's this weekend?"

He nods, launching into his theories about the campaign Mike has spent weeks planning, and Jonathan tries gamely to follow along as he picks at his scrambled eggs. Because Will prefers biking to and from school with his friends, he leaves first, while Jonathan clears the table and does the dishes before driving to the adjacent high school.

It's his least favorite part of the day, walking through those double doors. He takes a deep breath and hopes that everyone will just leave him alone.

During Trigonometry and U.S. History, he sits toward the back and doodles song lyrics in the margins of his notes, but he looks forward to third period.

For one, it's photography. The assignments are more open-ended compared to the intro class – no more wandering around town searching for letters of the alphabet in everyday objects. The class is small, and no one thinks he's weird because most of them are used to being outcasts themselves. They don't even talk to each other much, but sometimes they get to listen to music while they develop prints and arrange their collections.

There's another reason, and she sits right in front of him.

Jacqueline moved to Hawkins in freshman year, and he doesn't know a lot about her, but she played *Closer* when she got to pick the tape one time, and he's been fixated on her ever since.

Today, she's wearing a black dress and tights. Jonathan averts his eyes as he heads to his usual stool, rummaging through his book bag for his latest photos while Mr. Philips walks around, critiquing their work.

"It's great, as always," he tells him, scanning his desk. "But I already know that you can shoot landscapes and still lifes, Jonathan. I want to see you take a risk, try something new. Maybe focus on human subjects. Pay attention to the way they act in front of the camera, and compare that to a candid shot. Try to capture some *real emotions*."

Jonathan slumps in his seat, and he's startled when he hears another voice.

"For what it's worth...I like your pictures," Jacqueline says, and he just freezes. She smiles and turns back around, and Jonathan replays this moment in his mind for the entire weekend, cursing himself and wishing he had thought of a reply.

His shift is almost up, and he's debating whether there will still be enough sunlight to snap shots of people around the square, when his

least favorite customers round the corner.

Jonathan doesn't really *hate* people, but he doesn't like many of the ones he's met in his tiny corner of the world. He knows that there are millions of others out there, people like him who love good music and photography and don't care about sports. It's just that most people in Hawkins have disappointed him, if not outright called him names. In a small town, everyone has known each other their entire lives and felt entitled to gossip about others' personal dramas. His family has provided plenty of fodder for their discussions.

Nevertheless, he's gotten better at ignoring them. He honestly enjoys solitude, even though other people find it strange. For him, being around crowds is exhausting. He's always felt self-conscious when he speaks, overanalyzing every word and the smallest gesture and how it might be perceived. It's easier to handle in one-on-one situations, and he's actually pretty good at making his coworkers laugh as they pass the time. Aside from them, and obviously his mom and Will, he hasn't had much need to worry about other people.

But some people are worse than others, and three of them happen to love going to the movies.

Steve Harrington buys four tickets, and Jonathan's eyes drift to the group behind him. He's curious which blonde underclassmen he's courting tonight. To his surprise, he sees Mike's older sister, looking thoroughly out of place. She's answered the door a few times when he's picked up Will, but she looks different today. She's wearing more makeup, he thinks, and her pale blue shirt brings out her wide eyes.

Jonathan brings his attention back to the register, slides the tickets through the slot, and Steve saunters off. He's still puzzling over this scenario when a flash of brown hair and freckles comes into his field of view.

"What's that? I didn't hear you." Tommy sizes him up, but Jonathan watches impassively behind the glass.

It's a pointless exchange, prompting him to consider whether movie theaters have the right to refuse service. Fortunately, Steve calls his friend off, and he catches another glimpse of Nancy Wheeler. She has

her arms wrapped around her skinny frame, her expression unreadable. Remembering Mr. Philips' assignment, he glances at Carol and Tommy, who are all mean smiles and forced laughter. He wonders if they've ever felt a real emotion in their lives.

Twenty minutes later, as Jonathan is counting out, he's moved onto thinking about the people that matter. He's dwelling on Jacqueline's compliment – at the very least, why didn't he say, "*Thanks*" or "*I like yours too*"? – and when Eric hands him his paycheck, he pictures Will's earnest smile.

Only one more shift and another boring school day before he can finally spend some quality time with his little brother.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I generally dislike fanfiction that introduces new characters, but we didn't ever see Jonathan in class, and I thought it would be realistic for him to pine for a girl he doesn't even talk to. Seems more like high school to me than meeting someone and immediately getting together, even if there was potential for Jonathan and Nancy in the show. (But that will happen eventually if I continue this.)

Pop culture references, if you're interested: in Chapter 1, the movie they watched was *Never Say Never Again*. *Closer* is an album by Joy Division, a band that plays when Jonathan is listening to music in his room. In keeping with the convention of naming things after sci-fi, Mr. Philips is an homage to my favorite, Philip K. Dick. Anything else was chosen based on the time period or for the themes they convey.

### **Author's Note:**

The title is from a song by The Shins. It doesn't really have anything to do with this story, especially because it's not from the 80s, but I liked the alliteration, and it seemed to fit. You should listen to

it anyway.